

**AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS**

Please amend the claims as set forth below.

1-20. (Cancelled)

21. (New) An apparatus for printing an image onto a food item, the apparatus comprising:  
at least one cassette including a recess corresponding to a variable size and shape of the food item in order to receive the food item therein;  
a directing tray for receiving the at least cassette;  
a guide mechanism for receiving the directing tray, guiding the directing tray in a first direction, and maintaining a planar height of the directing tray; and  
a printing device that is moveable within a plane above the directing tray, for printing an image onto the food item.

22. (New) The apparatus of Claim 21, wherein a depth of the recess of the at least one cassette is determined based upon a thickness of the food item, such that a top surface of the food item is positioned an optimal distance from the printing device when the directing tray receiving the at least one cassette is positioned below the printing device.

23. (New) The apparatus of Claim 21, further comprising a computer for receiving an image and for controlling the printing device such that the received image is printed onto the food item.

24. (New) The apparatus of Claim 21, further comprising a motor including a motor shaft for providing a rotational movement to move the directing tray in the first direction.

25. (New) The apparatus of Claim 24, wherein the guide mechanism comprises a gear for engaging a rack attached to a bottom surface of the directing tray, the gear using the rotational movement of the motor to move the directing tray in the first direction.

26. (New) The apparatus of Claim 25, wherein the directing tray comprises a pair of flanges that flank the gear and rack for preventing lateral displacement between the gear and the rack.

27. (New) The apparatus of Claim 24, wherein the guide mechanism comprises two gears spaced axially apart for engaging two racks attached to a bottom surface of the directing tray, the two gears using the rotational movement of the motor to move the directing tray in the first direction.

28. (New) The apparatus of Claim 27, wherein the directing tray comprises two pairs of flanges that flank the two gears and the two racks, respectively, for preventing lateral displacement between the two gears and the two racks.

29. (New) The apparatus of Claim 21, further comprising at least one other cassette including another recess corresponding to a variable size and shape of another food item in order to receive the another food item therein.

30. (New) The apparatus of Claim 29, wherein a depth of the recess of the at least one cassette is determined based upon a thickness of the food item, such that a top surface of the food item is positioned an optimal distance from the printing device when the directing tray receiving the at least one cassette and the at least one other cassette is positioned below the printing device, and

wherein a depth of the another recess of the at least one other cassette is determined based upon a thickness of the another food item, such that a top surface of the another food item is positioned the optimal distance from the printing device when the directing tray receiving the at least one cassette and the at least one other cassette is positioned below the printing device.

31. (New) The apparatus of Claim 21, wherein the printing device prints the image onto the food item using edible ink or edible food dye.

32. (New) An method for printing an image onto a food item, the method comprising:  
selecting a size and shape of the food item;  
designing a cassette for supporting the food item including a recess corresponding to the size and shape of the food item in order to receive the food item therein;  
placing the food item into the cassette;  
placing the cassette into a directing tray for receiving a plurality of cassettes;  
positioning the directing tray into a guide mechanism;  
guiding the directing tray in a first direction while maintaining a planar height of the directing tray; and  
operating a printing device that is moveable within a plane above the directing tray, to print the image onto the food item as directing tray passes under the printing device in the first direction.

33. (New) The method of Claim 32, further comprising:  
receiving an image in a computer; and  
controlling the printing device such that the received image is printed onto the food item.

34. (New) The method of Claim 32, wherein designing the cassette for supporting the food item comprises determining a depth of the recess of the cassette based upon a thickness of the food item, such that a top surface of the food item is positioned an optimal distance from the printing device when the directing tray receiving is positioned below the printing device.

35. (New) The method of Claim 34, further comprising:  
selecting a size and shape of another food item;  
designing another cassette for supporting the another food item including a recess corresponding to the size and shape of the another food item in order to receive the another food item therein;  
placing the another food item into the another cassette; and  
placing the another cassette into the directing tray for receiving the plurality of cassettes,

wherein designing the another cassette for supporting the another food item comprises determining a depth of the recess of the another cassette based upon a thickness of the another food item, such that a top surface of the another food item is positioned the optimal distance from the printing device when the directing tray receiving the another cassette is positioned below the printing device..

36. (New) The method of Claim 32, further comprising:

selecting a size and shape of another food item;

designing another cassette for supporting the another food item including a recess corresponding to the size and shape of the another food item in order to receive the another food item therein;

placing the another food item into the another cassette; and

placing the another cassette into the directing tray for receiving the plurality of cassettes.

37. (New) The method of Claim 32, wherein operating the printing device that is moveable within the plane above the directing tray comprises moving the printing device in a second direction and a third direction within the plane, the second and the third directions being perpendicular to the first direction, in order to linearly apply the image to onto the food item as the directing tray is moved in the first direction below the printing device.

38. (New) The method of Claim 32, wherein the image is printed onto the food item using edible ink or edible food dye.